

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSON'S SCHEME (SVPS)

### BRIEFING PAPER

#### Background:

Following the full Council meeting on 31st August 2016 where motion 527 was referred to the Homes PDG stating "That this Council supports the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Scheme (SVPS) as detailed and commits to working with the private sector to achieve placements".

#### Government Syrian Resettlement Programme

The Syrian Resettlement Programme is fully funded by central Government. The headline figures regarding this funding were published in the Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015. The Home Office has recently released a 'funding instruction' with additional details about the funding that is available to Local Authorities. This specifies the following key points (applicable to year 1 of resettlement – Syrian refugees are granted leave to remain for 5 years initially):

- Funding for Local Authorities will be at a standard per capita rate (or tariff), £8,520 per refugee. There are additional moneys for children aged 3-4 (£2,250) and children 5-18 (£4,500).
- There is an additional payment of £1,000 (per child) for children with Special Educational Needs aged 3-18.
- Further payments to cover social care may be paid on a case-by-case basis following relevant assessments, through an Exceptional Cases Fund.
- Additional payments for educational purposes may be made as required in respect of supported young people (under 18s) in full time education, although further clarity is needed about this.
- Payments will be structured throughout the year, with 22% paid on the day of arrival of refugees in the UK, followed by six equal payments every two months.

UNIT COSTS FOR SYRIA VPR SCHEME* - LOCAL AUTHORITIES					
	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children U-3
	£	£	£	£	£
Local Authority Costs	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520
Education	0	0	4,500	2,250	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>8,520</b>	<b>8,520</b>	<b>13,020</b>	<b>10,770</b>	<b>8,520</b>

\* These payments may, from time to time, be adjusted by the Authority following consultation with the Recipients.

There are additional payments for health care (£600 and £2,000 respectively both primary and secondary care, paid separately to NHS organisations). There will also be additional payments for years 2 to 5 of resettlement (of each refugee) on a sliding scale from £5,000 in Year 2 to £1,000 in year 5 (per capita) for Local Authorities; however, there is little clarity

about how this additional funding will be used and what it will cover, and the Department for Communities and Local Government are currently tasked with identifying a funding model to apply beyond Year 1.

Syrian refugees arriving under Syrian Resettlement Programme have access to mainstream benefits (including Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance) and are entitled to work. Benefits are paid separately from the Local Authority tariff. It is expected that many will have complex health care and social care needs. The Local Authority (MDDC) is expected to be used to deliver a number of outcomes, including sourcing and preparing properties to house refugees, DCC SVPS will 'meet and greet' at the regional airport, help with orientation and integration services, gain access English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tuition, and educational support for children.

### **Accommodation**

As part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme there is a requirement to provide accommodation. This accommodation needs to meet local authority property standards that are available upon arrival and affordable. Properties must be self-contained units and not rooms of a shared house. Any properties used must be for at least 12 months (and ideally 2 years). With this accommodation they will receive integration caseworker support and access to translation services of which will be provided by Devon County Council SVPS.

Properties need to be furnished and readily equipped for households to move in to. The furniture package should not include luxury items. This means that funding received through the SVPS should be used for food storage, cooking and washing facilities but should not include the provision of other white goods or brown goods, i.e. TV's, DVD players or any other electrical entertainment appliances. This shall not preclude the Recipient from receiving additional luxury, white or brown goods through other sources of funding or communities or charities.

From national practice when considering availability and cost of accommodation in the area it is suggested 2 and 3 bedroom properties are sought to accept families with 2 or 3 children. This allows for sufficient funding for furnishings and management costs from the funds available from and administered by DCC SVPS.

The local authority is obliged to ensure that families are registered with utility companies and to ensure that arrangements for payments are put in place (no pre pay/card accounts). The local authority will provide briefings on the accommodation and health and safety issues for all new arrivals including the provision of an emergency contact point.

Devon County Council will assist the family initially with:

- Assisting with registration for and collection of Biometric Residence Permits following arrival
- Registering with local schools, English language and literacy classes
- Attending local Job Centre Plus appointments for benefit assessments
- Registering with a local GP
- Advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture as appropriate

- Providing assistance with access to employment.

Devon County Council shall develop an overarching (or framework) support plan and bespoke support plans for each family or individual for the first 12 month period of their support to facilitate their orientation into their new home/area.

Mid Devon District Council Housing Option team has limited access to accommodation in the district. This paper outlines the options, as well as the associated costs and risks associated with them.

### **Accommodation Options**

There are only 2 options available for the scheme, social housing has not been considered as Mid Devon housing waiting list is already in high demand.

#### **Private Sector Leased Properties (PSL)**

Mid Devon District Council unlike other local authorities do not have any leased properties from private landlords to accommodate homeless households. PSL's would need to be managed in-house by the Housing Options team to allow for closer monitoring of the tenancies. However there would be additional costs added to the service by this option, of which some of these costs may be set against the funds available via the SVPS funds.

Mid Devon did have approximately 60 PSL's about 10 years ago, but removed these as they were no longer in demand as homelessness had fallen, but also the high cost management fees that were associated with PSL's. Some consideration must be given to how we hand back properties to landlords as the previous PSL's proved expensive.

Work Required: MDDC would need to advertise in papers for landlords that would be prepared to participate in the scheme. Due to the SVPS budget being restricted the LA will only be able to pay the equivalent of the local housing allowance (LHA) as rental values above this will not be covered by the SVPS. This may prove difficult in obtaining properties as many landlords are not prepared to accept the LHA amounts. MDDC would be able to cover the extra costs via the SVPS funding fee administered by DCC.

These properties or offers of help would need to be inspected too ensure that they are an assured level of quality of accommodation. Once the property has been inspected contracts will be finalised with legal services to draw up lease agreements with MDDC, the landlord and DCC.

Timescale for this could be around 6-8 weeks depending on response times from the adverts and property inspections. These units of accommodation would then be managed by the Housing Options Team together with other temporary accommodation units.

Should the family leave the area or abandon the property the Council may gain void loss, but should be covered under the SVPS. If this happened then the SVPS could allocate another family or the Homeless team could use the accommodation until the end of the lease.

## Private Rented

The private rented market is unregulated and can be expensive. Recent research in the area has shown a gap of between £50 and £100 between benefit levels and local rents for 2 and 3 bed cases. This option can be explored if a landlord offered a property that meets the housing standards and we could offer both the tenant and landlord extra support. Funding for this option would come from the SVPS budget, as long as they are within the LHA amounts.

## **Finance arrangements**

The Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme commits to reimburse local authority associated with the scheme,

Costing of furnishing and equipping a property has been determined as £3,500 to include purchase of goods and staff time and assumes some assistance from the voluntary sector in sourcing sundry items from public donations.

The funding from the scheme will be managed through Devon County Council and apart from an initial set up amount payment will be in arrears and will require the Council to open up budget in advance of receipt of the budget.

The accommodation costs are primarily in the setting up of the property and management costs. Indications show that basic accommodation can be covered in the later years of the scheme with an expectation that once settled the tenancy management in the properties will be reduced and therefore costs will be minimal to nothing.

## **Deciding on Numbers and timescales**

Before the authority commits to any numbers of refugee's and over what period we should consider the following:

- Local property market (types of accommodation available)
  - Will landlords give up properties to LA when they can receive more money on the open market
  - How many will offer accommodation
  - What are the move on options afterwards
- Availability of school places
  - Which schools will be taking in refugees
- Proximity to local services and potential transport issues
  - What bus services are available
- Diversity of the local population and existing cohesion issues
- Ratio of potential refugees to the local population
- Availability of health provision

- Community safety
- Diversity and cultural considerations (availability of culturally appropriate food, places of worship etc).

### **Community Engagement**

Informing and preparing the local community for the arrival of refugees is an essential part of the resettlement process, ensuring that the host community is engaged and has a positive experience of resettlement. The local authority lead should explore options for engaging with media, local residents and third sector organisations to maintain community cohesion and facilitate integration of newly arrived refugees within the wider community. Managing donations and providing volunteering opportunities for the members of local community should be discussed with an advisory group.

### **Cultural considerations**

Crossing cultures can be difficult in any context. Newly-arrived Syrian refugees won't know everything about UK culture, and practitioners will need to be able to anticipate where important differences or misunderstandings might occur, from religion and ethnicity to food and drink, naming conventions, marriage, and child safeguarding, to gender, mental health, smoking and littering.

### **Exit Strategy**

At the end of a programme SVP should be enabled to integrate successfully into their local communities, by involving local communities is essential to foster positive local relationships.

Consideration must be given to:

- How we move families into the community
- Where we move the families, and how long do we have
- How we dispose of PSL's without losing out financially
- What impact assessments are to be completed

### **Considerations**

To use leased properties for accommodating refugees, the scheme could be run alongside the current provision for homelessness. The dispersed nature of leased properties reduces the potential public anxiety around local housing resources being used for immigration purposes.

Consideration must be taken into account as to the number of properties we take on until we can determine that we have a source of accommodation is affordable and sustainable.

What happens when the SVPS need to move out of the PSL, what housing options do they have access to? Are they treated the same as any other foreign national, with access to Social Housing?

Who will fund shortfall costs on rental amounts and Council tax, will the Council have to pick up these associated costs? Who will fund the return of PSL back to landlords?

How long will the SVPS pay for the management and translation services after the SVPS is no longer considered to be a refugee?

The Council consider setting aside a budget for the initial costs involved in setting up and running the SVPS.

The Council formally join the Settlement Support Delivery Support Group that meet each month, together with DCC, ECC, TDC, Police, Health Services and the Refugee support Devon.

Further information can be found at:

**[Syrian refugee resettlement - A guide for local authorities](#)**

**[http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/1.11\\_resettlement\\_guide\\_08.pdf/cc6c7b51-23a8-4621-b95c-a30bc3da438e](http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/1.11_resettlement_guide_08.pdf/cc6c7b51-23a8-4621-b95c-a30bc3da438e)**